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W. W. Vincent, chief, western
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U. S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

HOW TO READ THE LABEL

Sea Foods

The Food and Drugs Act covers fresh fish, as well as canned fish. Due to recent improvements in the transportation of fresh fish under refrigeration, their consumption is increasing rapidly, especially among people living considerable distances from the sea coasts. These improvements have brought to us varieties of fish not available in local waters. For example, we now enjoy frozen albacore and halibut from Japan, frozen halibut from Alaska, as well as finnan haddies, and other varieties from the east coast of Canada. Do you know that most of the white meat tuna today packed in California is from frozen albacore imported from Japan?

Sometimes it is difficult to know just what you get when you order fillet of sole in a restaurant. I think I have received as fillet of sole, not only fillets of flounder, but rock fish and maybe shark. Of course, when they served me those products as fillet of sole, they were violating your State and municipal food laws. I am glad to say that very little deception of this kind is practiced by your better restaurants.

Everybody knows halibut. The large ones are called whales. And fishermen call those from 10 to 40 pounds in weight, medium size, and the smaller ones, weighing less than 10 pounds, "chickens." My friends, the "chicken halibut" you get in Los Angeles is not the "chicken halibut" you get in Seattle, but both of these fish belong to the halibut family and the one sold generally in Southern California is related or similar to the "summer flounder" of the east coast.

Throughout this country, red snapper from the Gulf Coast is considered a delicacy. Some years ago, in the Middle West, you did not always get the genuine red snapper, but frequently the red rockfish from the Pacific Coast. Your Food and Drug Administration promptly took steps to prevent further deception of this type. Although this rockfish is generally called a rock cod, or red cod, along the Pacific Coast, it is not a cod, nor is it related to the cod family.

In days past, some firms have shipped, labeled as white fish, certain lake herring, and the published Notices of Judgment tell of this and of those shippers who have been kept from defrauding you. They also relate many actions against fish products, both fresh and canned; actions which eliminated from the channels of commerce material that was in whole or in part decomposed.

The preserving of fish is one of our oldest industries. Undoubtedly, sun-drying was the first method of fish preservation. Later, the practice of salting and then drying was employed. It was also found that smoking gave a different and desirable flavor. I imagine that mild curing - salting

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in brine under refrigeration--- was probably the next development. Then followed modern canning and rapid freezing.

Perhaps I'd better tell you how some well-known fishery products are prepared. Do you know what a kippered fish is?---- How pickled fish are prepared?-- What bloaters and finnan haddie are? Let's start with the salted fish. Large quantities of mackerel, herring, cod, anchovies, some sea bass and other fish are so prepared. Some, mackerel, for example, are packed in dry salt. No water is added, the juices of the fish forming a brine with the salt. This process is called hard salting. Others, like cod, are salted in a similar manner and when cured are removed from the brine and dried in the sun. The pieces are packed loosely in wooden boxes or pressed into small bricks. Sometimes the packers remove the skins and bones and this product you will find labeled, "skinless and boneless," or "absolutely boneless," if such is a fact. Hard-salted fish in brine is usually packed in kits or various sized barrels. If a fish is "kippered," it has been split through the back from head to tail, eviscerated, or cleaned, lightly salted and lightly smoked. Where a fish has had the head removed and has been eviscerated, but not split along the back, it is known as a "kippered unsplit."

Northwestern packers kipper salmon. You see it in the local markets. For kippering, they generally use the white-meat King or Chinook salmon, also some Cohoes or Silver Salmon. Some of that fish, after dressing, is frozen, to remove some of the moisture. Upon thawing, it is placed in a strong brine for several hours, then dipped in a coloring solution which makes the flesh appear red, placed on mesh-wire trays and put in smokehouse where it is smoked for a period of hours. This fish is then wrapped in parchment paper. You generally find it in boxes of about 10-pound content, and the labels on the packages indicate that the product is artificially colored. This material is perishable and is not held for any protracted period of time.

Some salmon is smoked, and for this product, a mild-cured salmon or one out of salt solution is used. The smoking process in this case lasts longer than it does in the kippering process and the fish is generally more salty and, when marketed, of a lower moisture content.

In the preparation of both smoked and kippered salmon, a fire of hardwood, such as oak, is generally used.

Finnan haddie is a kippered haddock. In its preparation, it is first salted in strong brine, then removed and fastened to sticks suspended in the smokehouse, and allowed to dry for a little while. Then an oak fire is kindled and allowed to burn freely for a period up to 18 hours. The fire is then smothered in sawdust producing a dense smoke. Finnan Haddie has a relatively high moisture content, usually around 70%, and therefore, like kippered salmon, finnan haddie is only kept for a short period of time without refrigeration. Certain dealers have used artificial color, both vegetable and coal tar, on haddocks. Some people feel this serves to conceal inferiority due to lack of proper smoking, while others feel that it merely imparts a more pleasing color to the product. In any event you will find the product labeled "Artificially Colored." The Food and Drugs Act does not permit use of artificial color on any product where it serves to conceal inferiority. In the case of the artificially-colored kippered white Chinook salmon, we do not hold that inferiority is concealed because the red Chinook and white Chinook salmon are regarded of equal quality. Of course, the red Chinooks are the salmon commonly canned and the white Chinooks are the ones that are

kippered.

Large quantities of both kippered herring and mackerel are sold in this country and, since they, too, are perishable products, some concerns now can them. A little kippered salmon is also canned.

A bloater is a large smoked herring. The amount of smoking accorded it depends somewhat upon the distance of the particular market for which the fish is being prepared. The more distant the market, the greater the amount of smoking needed. Long smoking periods result in correspondingly lower moisture content of the fish as shipped.

Folks, I won't take the time to describe in detail the various salting processes or mild-curing processes used to preserve such fish as mackerel, salmon, herring and codfish. Most of them are sold out of the wooden buckets, kits, or barrels in which the fish are received and the labelings are therefore usually not available for your inspection.

You may be interested to know of some of the unusual fish, or other seafood products, that reach our shores from time to time. These are to be found in establishments operated by people of foreign lineage, delicatessens, and stores catering to fancy trade. From Japan, Spain, Germany, Italy and China, we occasionally receive canned eels prepared in different ways. Some are pickled and some are canned according to American processes. From England, Scotland and Nova Scotia, occasional importations of canned finnan haddie reach us.

The "anchovy sprats" from the North Sea countries which, last week, I told you were not anchovies at all, but sprats prepared by a distinctive process are pickled fish not sterilized within the cans and frequently come to you in a lobster sauce. They must be held under refrigeration. If refrigeration is inadequate, the cans holding this product will frequently swell or become puffed, due to the formation of gas from the pickled fish within the can. My friends, your Food and Drug Administration warns you not to eat fish or fish-food products of any kind that in any way appear abnormal. A swelled or puffed can of any food product is potentially dangerous at all times.

Some canned abalone is prepared in this country and other canned abalone reaches us from both Mexico and Japan. Your Food and Drug Administration insists that certain weight requirements be met with regard to the meat content in cans of this commodity, since it is generally packed in a brine solution. The weight declared, you will find, generally represents the net weight of the meat within the tin.

We occasionally get an importation of canned squid from Japan, China, or Spain. The inky black appearance of the liquid in which this product is packed is due to the diffusion of its protective excretion.

I forgot to tell you about fish balls. Lots of fish balls, fish cakes and fish pudding are imported from Norway. Fish balls and fish cakes consist usually of ground codfish and potato flour with seasonings, either packed in a fish bouillon or salt solution. The total net content is declared upon the labels, because the bouillon or sauce carries food value and is not discarded. If fish other than cod are used in the preparation of the fish cakes, you will frequently find that the labels so read--- for example, coal fish is one of those you will occasionally find on canned fish-cake labels.

